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THE PRESIDENT'S TRIP TO AFRICA

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I rise today to speak on the President's current trip to Africa and the importance of Africa to United States national interests. I highly applaud the President's decision to go to Africa. The President's trip to Ghana, Botswana, South Africa, Uganda, Senegal and Rwanda comes on the heels of visits to the region last year by both the First Lady and the Secretary of State. This marks only the second time that an American President has undertaken an official trip to sub-Saharan

Africa, and the first visit to any of the countries on the President's itinerary. As we have seen by the warm reception that the President has enjoyed so far, this first visit in 20 years by an American President carries considerable symbolic significance for the 650 million people in Africa. For the 270 million people of America, the President's visit will help further strengthen U.S.-Africa relations and promote important national interests.

President Clinton's trip highlights a very different Africa from the one President Carter saw during the first Presidential visit in 1978. At that time, Washington largely viewed Africa as merely another battleground for U.S.-Soviet Cold War competition. Today, in many parts of the region nations are working to reform politically and economically. More elections have occurred at all levels of government in the last five years than in the last two decades. The traditional image of African states controlled by dictatorial strongmen

is giving way to multiparty political systems with an increasing appreciation for democratic institutions and processes. And economically, many African countries have rejected the failed policies of central planning in favor of privatization of state assets and the creation of free markets.

Mr. President, the image that we often see of Africa in the media largely is one of famine, instability, and ethnic conflict. The purpose of the President's trip is to refocus the international spotlight to include the emerging economic and political renaissance that is occurring in some countries. I applaud President Clinton's recognition of the importance of including Rwanda in his itinerary. In contrast to the relatively positive outlook for the other countries on the President's itinerary, the outlook for Rwanda is not so clear and bright. Rwanda is still reeling from the aftershocks of the brutal 1994 genocide that resulted in the deaths of upwards of 800,000 men, women and children. For the last two years, more than 120,000 accused genocidaires have waited in prison for a trial. The country remains under insurgent attack by the 1994 genocidaires who are now based in neighboring Congo.

Rwanda is still waiting for justice. Rwanda--and the rest of Central Africa--will not be able to move forward until there is justice for the victims of genocide. Justice is the critical factor that will

either allow that country to move forward, or see it fall backwards into bloodshed. I support the President's proposed Great Lakes Justice Initiative to assist the states of the region to strengthen judicial systems and the rule of law. I also urge the Administration to continue its efforts to ensure the effectiveness of the International War Crimes Tribunal for Rwanda. The Tribunal was established over three years ago to bring to justice leaders of the 1994 genocide. To date, however, only 35 persons have been indicted and the Tribunal has yet to hand down its first sentence. By contrast, the Yugoslav Tribunal already has cases in the appeal stage. The Tribunal's effective and efficient functioning will be key to allowing the Rwandan justice system the political and legal flexibility it needs to deal with the 120,000 men in prison.

Mr. President, Rwanda is not the only troubled African nation. Some nations, such as Liberia, the Central African Republic, and Angola, are at critical crossroads and will make decisions that will have a significant impact on their political and economic futures. Others, such as Nigeria, Sudan and Cameroon, have resisted the tide of political openness and economic reform that is sweeping through their neighbors and have remained repressive. As the President continues current efforts in Africa and undertakes new initiatives, it is critical that the United States strongly and clearly encourages those countries at the crossroads to choose the right road. At the same time, we should be unambiguous in our non-acceptance of those countries that continue to choose political repression and failed economic policies.

One of the most critical tests that United States foreign policy currently faces in Africa is the Democratic Republic of Congo. An enormous country the size of the United States east of the Mississippi River, the Congo is strategically located in the heart of Africa. Bordered by nine different countries, it is at once a Southern and

Central African state. Blessed with natural and human resources, this country for the last thirty years has been cursed with poor leadership and financial ruin. The term kleptocracy was coined for the despotic rule of former President Mobutu Sese Seko which saw billions of dollars of foreign assistance misappropriated and the national coffers drained.

Foreign Relations Committee staff members who traveled to Congo last month saw a country in crisis. Critical infrastructure such as health and transportation are in disarray. There is no justice system to speak of. Human rights conditions are, in the words of one international human rights worker, catastrophic. The Congolese President, Laurent Kabila, a guerilla opposed to the former government for most of his adult life, has no relevant experience governing a country. The same is true for most of his cabinet. Perhaps the only positive news to report is that the security situation is relatively calmer for the moment than it has been in recent years. As discouraging a picture as this might be, recent Central African history has shown that Congo's future disposition will have a significant impact on its neighbors with potential consequences for much of Africa--and United States national interests.

Mr. President, some might wonder whether the United States has any interests in Africa. Since the end of the Cold War, there are those who have argued that the United States should cut back on its engagements abroad. In regards to Africa, they argue that we should focus on regions of greater geopolitical and economic importance. Let me state clearly my belief that without a doubt the United States needs to be actively engaged in Africa.

Why? Because just as we support democracy, free trade and human rights in the rest of the world, so too should we continue to support these goals in Africa. Moreover, the United States has strong economic interests in Africa. U.S. exports to Africa last year totaled \$6.2 billion, more than

total U.S. exports to all of the states of the former Soviet Union combined. Since 1994, U.S. trade with sub-Saharan Africa has grown on average at 16.9% annually, outpacing growth in global trade in 1995 and 1996. Through our engagement with Africa we support and encourage partners who cherish the same values that we do. By encouraging political and economic stability we contribute to the preservation of our own nation's continued prosperity and security.

Mr. President, some among us may be disillusioned into believing that our interests in Africa are purely humanitarian, that Africa doesn't hold any strategic value for the United States. When I hear statements to this effect, I have to wonder whether they are living in the same world as the rest of us. As we have seen with the recent Asian financial crisis, global drug trade, and even the El Niño weather phenomenon, Americans today are more interconnected, if not interdependent, with the rest of the world than at any previous time in our nation's history. At this unique point in time as the sole superpower with the ability virtually to reach around the globe, the rest of the world has an equally unprecedented ability to touch us back. In such a global environment it is vital to our nation's security that we exercise vigilance in the conduct of our foreign relations.

Mr. President, even if we could stick our head in the sand, the rest of our body would be exposed to all of the negative consequences that a neglected

Africa would incur. Imagine the effects of a large region of the world ignored and not encouraged to develop effective health systems, where new exotic diseases are not checked but given free reign to develop and old ones can develop drug resistance. The Asian bird flu would be nothing compared to what we might see. Imagine nations with minimal resources but great needs not supported to effectively maintain their natural environment, and compelled to compromise rainforests and natural ecosystems vital to our planet's well-being. If we think El Niño is bad, just wait until we meet his big brother.

Mr. President, we wouldn't allow this to occur in any other part of the world, and we certainly can not afford to allow this to happen in Africa. Protecting American interests in Africa is no simple task. The subtleties and complexities that confront us in the 48 nations of sub-Saharan Africa require diplomatic skill and finesse. How does Rwanda move to democracy whilst Hutus vastly outnumber Tutsis, and distrust and violence on both sides goes back generations? How do ethnic communities in Kenya share power in such a way that the rights of the minority are protected? How does the Congo move towards democratic governance and financial responsibility after a generation of misgovernment and kleptocracy?

There are no easy solutions to any of these questions, but the answers must be found if Africa is to advance politically and economically--and U.S. national interests are to be protected--into the next century.